

THE
PROCEEDINGS
AND
S P E E C H E S,
AT THE
Meeting
THE SEVENTEENTH NOVEMBER, 1795,
AT
ST. ANDREW'S HALL,
Norwich
TO PETITION PARLIAMENT
AGAINST
Lord Grenville's and Mr. Pitt's
Treason
AND
SEDITION BILLS.

Norwich :
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AT half past eleven o'clock, Sigismund Trafford, Esq. being unanimously called to the chair, opened the business of the meeting, by the following concise and energetic address.

Gentlemen,

I am thoroughly convinced there are many persons in this assembly more capable than myself of filling this chair; yet, as it is your pleasure to call me to it, I will cheerfully endeavour to fulfil the incumbent duties, according to the best of my abilities.

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Gentlemen,

Gentlemen, the business under consideration is, two bills now depending in parliament, whose professed design is to extend the laws of treason, and to abridge those liberties we have now enjoyed for four hundred years, very much to our own satisfaction and happiness, and greatly to the honour and personal security of our sovereigns. The existing laws were enacted in the 25th year of that most powerful, most enlightened, and most popular king, Edward III. and have ever since been considered as the greatest blessing, and most permanent safeguard of the subject. How far the present bills are consistent with this, or indeed any other free constitution, situated as you have placed me, I must leave you to determine; but if you think (as from my soul I do) that it is a flagitious attempt upon our liberties, you have not only the right, but it is your sacred duty, to inform your representatives of your opinion, which I hope, gentlemen, you will do, in that moderate, I say that moderate, but firm and decisive tone, which it behoves men to maintain, who are contending for, and defending, interests, the nearest and dearest to themselves and their posterity.

Mr.

Mr. E. S. Turner now read the following clauses of two bills: viz. Grenville's bill, intituled, "*An Act for the safety and preservation of his Majesty's person and government, against treasonable and seditious practices and attempts.*" And Pitt's bill, intituled, "*A Bill for the more effectually preventing seditious meetings and assemblies.*"

SKETCH OF LORD GRENVILLE'S BILL.

"And be it enacted by the king's most excellent majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the lords spiritual and temporal, and commons, in this present parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, that if any person or persons whatever, after the day of in the year during the natural life of our most gracious sovereign lord the king, (whom Almighty God preserve and bless with a long and prosperous reign) and until the end of the next session of parliament, after a demise of the crown, shall, within the realm or without, compass, imagine, invent, devise, or intend death or destruction, or any bodily harm tending to death or destruction, maim or wounding, imprisonment or restraint of the per-

son of the same our sovereign lord the king, his heirs and successors, or to deprive or depose him or them from the stile, honour or kingly name, of the imperial crown of this realm, or of any other of his majesty's dominions or countries, or to levy war against his majesty, his heirs and successors within this realm or without; or to move or stir any foreigner or stranger with force to invade this realm, or any other of his majesty's dominions or countries, being under the obedience of his majesty, his heirs and successors; and such compassings, imaginations, inventions, devices or intentions, or any of them, shall express, utter or declare, by any printing, writing, preaching, or malicious and advised speaking, being legally convicted thereof, upon the oaths of two lawful and credible witnesses, upon trial, or otherwise convicted or attainted by due course of law, then every such person or persons so as aforesaid offending, shall be deemed, declared and adjudged to be a traitor and traitors, and shall suffer pains of death, and also lose and forfeit as in cases of high treason.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That if any person or persons within

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that part of Great Britain called England, at any time from and after the day of in the year during his majesty's life, and until the end of the next session of parliament, after a demise of the crown, shall maliciously and advisedly, by writing, printing, preaching, or other speaking, express, publish, utter or declare any words, sentences, or other thing or things, to incite or stir up the people to hatred or dislike of the person of his majesty, his heirs or successors, or the established government and constitution of this realm, then every such person and persons, being thereof legally convicted, shall be liable to such punishment as may by law be inflicted in cases of high misdemeanors; and if any person or persons shall, after being so convicted, offend a second time, and be thereupon convicted, such person or persons shall, on such second conviction, be adjudged to be transported for seven years, to such place as shall be appointed by his majesty for the transportation of offenders."



SKETCH OF MR. PITT'S BILL*.

"To him it seemed, that the great point would be, the giving of a more marked power to the magistrate to put an end to any meeting, which, in his conception, threatened to produce consequences detrimental to the public peace and security: not that he meant to prevent legal meetings, but that previous notice should be given to the magistrate of an intention to hold such a meeting. The first measure, therefore, would consist in this public notice; the second would tend to recognize the power of the magistrate to be present at such meetings with proper peace officers, and to inflict penalties on any persons who should attempt to prevent them. It would also be proper, that, whatever the pretext of any meeting should be, if discourse or speeches should be held at such meeting, calculated to stir up hatred and contempt against the king's person and government, the ma-

* Pitt's bill being very long, instead of inserting it in this place, we give the sketch he gave of it Nov. 10th in the house of commons.

magistrate should have the power of apprehending persons holding such discourse; and that all who should attempt to prevent the exercise of that power, should be deemed guilty of felony. Further, that if the meeting should be deemed by the magistrate to be seditious, he should have the power of dispersing it by proclamation; and after a certain period after such proclamation, if the persons assembled should refuse to disperse, they should be deemed to be guilty of felony."

The hissings having ceased which marked the hall's abhorrence of the bills, Mr. Wilks, the Norfolk Farmer, came forward to move that a petition be presented to the house of commons, praying that house would put its decisive negative upon the bills in question. The farmer prefaced his motion with an animated speech, of which the following is the substance:

Citizens,

After having heard the present bills, is it possible for any man to preserve silence? However other gentlemen may feel on the occasion, with me,

me, it is impossible. I come forward therefore not as a partizan, not to oppose the measures of administration for the sake of opposition, but from a conviction that every man is bound,—bound by an attachment to the government and constitution of his country, as by law established at the glorious revolution of 1688, by his just claim to the once acknowledged rights of Britons, by the respect and reverence he feels for the sacred memory of his illustrious ancestors, and by the obligation he is under to his family, country, and posterity, to resist by every legal means the present bills, and to do every thing in his power to prevent their passing into laws. Methinks I hear somebody exclaim why? Why oppose them? Why, sirs, I will tell you why, for these reasons.—1st. Because they are absolutely superfluous and unnecessary—2d. Because it is impossible they should answer the ends for which they are professedly brought forward—and 3d. Because they are detestable in their nature, and likely to be dreadful in their operation and effects. To prove they are superfluous and unnecessary, requires very, very little argument indeed—facts, those stubborn things, which will bear no contradiction, set this

this point beyond the power of dispute. One object of the bills is, to prevent or punish treasonable or seditious practices. To prevent crimes is beyond the power of any government; all it can do, therefore, is to punish in order to prevent. Here then let me ask, Has not the government of this country always had in its power to punish treason and sedition? Let any man take a retrospective view of the history of his own country, and point out the reign in which the scaffold has not been stained with the blood of traitors, and in which seditious persons have not suffered pains and penalties, and I myself will lift up both hands for passing the present bills. Treason and sedition ought to be punished, and if the now existing laws have not provided punishment for such offences, they ought to do it now; but while a Hardy, a Tooke, a Thelwall, a Holt, a Symonds, a Ridgeway, a Winterbotham, and an hundred more of that description of sufferers present themselves to my imagination, I shall strenuously contend that laws now exist to punish treason and sedition; and that, therefore, the present bills are absolutely superfluous and unnecessary. Say then, is it not

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beneath the dignity of grave senators to waste their
 • time in framing superfluous laws, or,

‘ In dropping buckets into empty wells,

‘ And growing old in drawing nothing up.’

In the next place, I oppose the bills on the ground of impotency. According to my views, it will be impossible they should answer the ends for which they are professedly intended. Another avowed object of them is, to preserve the person and government of his Majesty—glorious object indeed! Without a farcasm give me leave to exclaim—May the king live for ever! but so far from preserving, they will endanger both his person and government, by rendering the monarch an object of terror, and by alienating the heart of the subject from the law and the king. Sirs, make a man a tyrant and you divest him of every thing amiable originally attached to the man—you hold him up to universal abhorrence, and place him in the most perilous and critical situation in which he can possibly exist. Perhaps you will believe me, when I tell you, that such is the philanthropy of our gracious sovereign, such the mildness of his disposition, and the goodness of his heart,

heart, it would be no easy task to make him a tyrant: but should the two branches of the legislature frame tyrannic laws, and prevail on his majesty to give reluctantly his royal assent and signature, it is to be dreaded they would, by that act, sign and seal his death warrant, build his sepulchre, and toll his passing bell.

The same idea attaches to the law which I have applied to the king—Let the law be a transcript of the divine law, just and good, and it cannot fail to be respected and obeyed; but make the law a tyrant, and you make it hateful, and though men may submit to it for a while, the time will come when they will burn the statute books, and overturn that system of government which can only be supported by the power of the sword. If this be the true state of the case, I may venture to maintain, we are all bound by our loyal concern for the personal safety of his majesty, by our ardent wish for the stability of his throne, and the preservation of his government, to pray that these bills may not pass into laws.

The bills now before you, gentlemen, ought

to be opposed, not only because they are superfluous and unnecessary, and can answer no good end to the nation, or to the sovereign, but because they are detestable in their nature, and likely to be dreadful in their operation.—Let me here observe, to constitute a good law, it is necessary it should prohibit actions detrimental to the state, enjoin actions for the good of society, and hold forth rewards and punishments, to give it force suited to the nature of its prohibitions and injunctions. Let me ask you, Gentlemen, is this the case with the laws in question? What do they prohibit? They prohibit indirectly all meetings for public purposes—they prohibit indirectly all liberty of speech and of the press—they are, in fact, a daring attack on the best rights of Britons, designed to perpetuate the abuses of government, by the suppression of all popular societies, and free investigation, by laying an undue restraint on political discussion. You may meet, it is true, should these bills pass, but how? With a venal magistrate at your head. You will be allowed to speak in future, it is true, but how?—as I do now?—(here a general cry of, No, no, no, took place.)—You have anticipated my answer,

swer, said the speaker, by your just reply of, No, no; for though we may speak in future, it must be under the controul of a venal magistrate, who is to be the sole judge of the legality of what we say.—If he thinks we say any thing disrespectful of his majesty and government, and calculated to bring the constitution into disrepute, he can order his satellites to seize our persons, he can disperse the company by proclamation, and death may be the consequence of resisting his despotic mandate.

Now, Gentlemen, what becomes of the Bill of Rights? It is violated, it is repealed. The 5th article of that bill declares, it is the right of the subject to petition the king; but how, Gentlemen, will it be possible to petition under the restriction of these bills! If we attempt to state our grievances, the magistrate, perhaps, will declare the grievances of which we complain do not exist; he may declare the meeting to be improper, and break it up. The 10th clause of the Bill of Rights declares, that unusual and cruel punishments shall not be inflicted; but these bills are intended to enact, that an endeavour to
bring

bring the government into contempt and disrepute, shall be punished with the loss of liberty and property, and that resisting the arbitrary will of a venal servant of the crown, shall subjugate the offender to immediate death. Tell me, is not this to inflict unusual and cruel punishment, and a direct violation of our acknowledged rights?

Rouse, countrymen! your liberties are invaded; rescue them from the hands of unjust assailants, by an unanimous resolve, that this meeting do petition parliament, that these bills may not be suffered to pass into laws.

Tooke Harwood rose to second the motion for a petition, which he prefaced by the following address.

Citizens,

Had this meeting been called merely to oppose party against party, I should not have been present at it; or being present, should not have taken the trouble to have opened my lips on either side. The contentions of parties have in a great degree contributed

contributed to bring you to the precipice on which you now stand; they are generally struggles for the loves and fishes, and the hard gotten earnings of the poor always the prize, and price of their credulity. I love no party, and I am well aware no party can love me.

If merely the putting down wicked ministers and their miscreant tools was our object, it would not be worth our contention, for they are making such rapid strides towards arbitrary power, that they must inevitably soon work their own destruction, and fall victims to their own ambition. But, alas! my fellow-citizens, however surely they may be working their own destruction in the end, what is to become of the unhappy people of this country, sunk as they must then be, nay even now are, in the lowest abyss of unexampled misery—many, very many of you, my poor fellow-citizens, may perhaps at this time be suffering all the unhappiness attendant on extreme poverty; and acute must be your feelings, not for yourselves alone, but for your helpless children crying for bread. All this you must be well aware is owing to the want of a due representation of the people in parliament;

ment; and, what is worse, it is partly your own fault. But I ought not to upbraid you; for such is the iniquity of your oppressors, that they make your very miseries the touchstone by which they force you to vote for some worthless individual whom they chuse to exalt, merely that he in return may provide for them at your expence. Most of the supporters of the present measures are actual receivers of the bounties of government, or expectants still more zealous, even in the dirtiest of offices. They have most daringly plunged you into almost inextricable misery, and to complete your misfortunes, and their own triumph, support the present bills to suppress all popular meetings, as the only means of maintaining their tottering power. Ministers and their satellites should know from former examples, that people, whilst they may complain, do not cease to hope; but when wretchedness is forced to hide itself in silence and despair, it becomes sullen and dangerous; for who will not **STRIKE** when they are likely to be hanged or transported for speaking.

Had these bills passed last year, nine innocent men would have lost their lives—Ministers then
furnished

furnished themselves with pretences as infamous and false as their present accusations of the Corresponding Society being the cause of the insults offered to his majesty. I am a member of that society, and, I confess, I feel myself elated when I boast that honour—the men that compose that society are good and true men—men of too much information to think of riot and confusion—so far from being dangerous to the government they have been the best friends of the constitution, by endeavouring to preserve the liberties of the subject, and to extirpate the locusts that feed upon its vitals. Discussion is the only means to support a free constitution. But the government or constitution we shall be under when the present bills pass, can alone be supported by the bayonet. But ministers, and their satellites, would do well to remember, that arbitrary acts have always preceded the overthrow of oppression, and stop ere it is too late! for if they drive the people, now so patient under their sufferings, too far down the gulph of misery, and no alternative left but death or transportation if they complain, what will be the consequence? Is it not to be feared that they may consider arms as the last resource of misery driven to despair. I

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love

love my neighbour as myself, if he be good and virtuous—if wicked, I wish him to live and to repent. But if ever such a period arrives, where can they then hide themselves? No force on their part can resist, no flight can save! It is a duty we owe to our country, to our families and ourselves, to do our utmost to prevent these bills passing, as the best means to prevent such calamities, and never relax, though the system of terror hangs over our heads. Some of us, probably, may fall a sacrifice; but I have made my mind up on all occasions, and cannot do better justice to my feelings on that subject, than by quoting the words of Joseph Gerald, that virtuous patriot, who fell a victim to Scotch Law; who, when he was doomed to the infamous sentence, observed, “that out of my ashes will arise a flame that must inevitably consume the tyrants of the earth.”

Alderman Robert Harvey then prefaced his speech, by declaring his readiness to assent to all that had been said of reverence for the bill of rights, love for the constitution, and regard for the liberties of his country; but in the present crisis he contended, that any internal division would encourage

courage our enemies to persevere in the war, and render the terms of peace more degrading. He professed to be perfectly willing to confide in the wisdom, justice, and patriotism of our legislature; each individual of which was amenable to the laws as well as the meanest citizens. He was happy in saying, that he modelled his conduct upon the example of a man high in the estimation both of God and man, the patriotic Mr. Wilberforce, (*a cry here from the crowd, of a hypocrite! a hypocrite!*) and asserted, that the people would have a right of assembling after the passing of the bills; and he thought that opposition to them was useless, if not dangerous.

Mr. Wilks in reply to Mr. Harvey, granted that each member of the legislature is at present amenable to the law; but that the present bills went to make them a privileged order. The very act, observed he, that grants *them* liberty of speech, implies, that *men in general* are to be deprived of that privilege.—He granted also, that it might be lawful to meet under the present bills, but it must be with the consent, and under the control of some justice of the peace, or other officer, to whom we

must bow the suppliant knee, with a "*Pray Sir, what may I say?*" And perhaps the very gentleman who spoke last, may be the very person empowered to negative all our proceedings. Mr. Wilks professed to be a friend to free discussion but as the present was a contest between the rights of the subject, and the power of the magistrate, he thought it rather indelicate in Mr. H. to appear the abettor of the present measures, which did not appear to have one advocate present except himself.

Mr. Trafford and Mr. Ollyett Woodhouse having now read the petition on different parts of the hustings, for the convenience of the meeting, it was moved to adopt it as the petition of that meeting.

Mr. W. Barnard having seconded the motion, it was agreed to by universal acclamation.

The following gentlemen were now mentioned, and called for by the public, as a committee for procuring signatures, and forwarding the petition to parliament.

S. Trafford,

S. Trafford, Esq.	John March
James Crowe, Esq.	John Pitchford, Jun.
J. G. Bafely, Esq.	Edward Rigby
B. Gurney, Esq.	Wm. Taylor, Jun.
Wm. Barnard	E. S. Turner
Thos. Barnard	Mark Wilks
John Cozens	Wm. White
Jonathan Davey	Ollyett Woodhouse
R. Dinmore, Jun.	and
Tooke Harwood	Wm. Youngman

E. Rigby, Esq. moved the thanks of the meeting to the chairman, for his spirited and timely exertions in the cause of freedom. Thanks were also voted to the Duke of Bedford, Mr. Fox, the Whig Club, and all the friends of freedom, who have stood forward as the advocates of the people, to oppose the present daring outrage against the rights of Britons.—The business of the day being over, Mr. Wilks advised the multitude to retire to their respective places of abode with order and decorum, and to demonstrate to their fellow-citizens, by a peaceable uniform deportment, how firmly they were attached to the NATION, the LAW, and the *king*.

The

The advice had its due effect, and the meeting dispersed: but with the universal adoption of that sentiment sanctioned by the blood of millions, and engraven on the heart of every *true* Briton,
LIBERTY OR DEATH.



*To the honourable the Commons of Great Britain,
 in Parliament Assembled, the PETITION of the
 Inhabitants of the City of Norwich,*

Sheweth,

THAT your petitioners viewing with extreme surprise, and with great alarm, the introduction of two bills into parliament, the one intituled, “*An Act for the Safety of his Majesty’s Person and Government, against treasonable and seditious Practices and Attempts;*” and the other, “*An Act to prevent seditious Assemblies;*” which they conceive to be infringements upon the constitution, and violations of their best rights and liberties, have met in Common Hall, to beg of your honourable house, that you will at this awful crisis, act as behoves the representatives of a people, jealous of
 their

their liberties, and oppose your authority to this innovation, unprecedented since the revolution of 1688.

That your petitioners have always considered the law enacted in the 25th year of king Edward III. as since modified by divers statutes, to be the greatest safeguard of the subject, and the best personal security of the sovereign.

That whilst your petitioners lament the late insult offered to the person of the king, they cannot but think, that the existing laws are adequate to the punishment of the offenders, and if properly enforced, sufficient to prevent a repetition of such outrages.

That your petitioners, knowing the distressed situation of the great majority of the people, are decidedly of opinion, that to deprive them of the means of complaining, will in the issue, drive them to measures, which the humanity of your petitioners most sincerely deprecates.

Your

Your petitioners, therefore, earnestly pray, that your honourable house will put your decisive negative upon these bills; which, if they pass into laws, will render nugatory the 5th clause of the Bill of Rights, and overthrow the most valuable privileges of Englishmen.

And your petitioners, &c.

On the 22d. inst. the above petition, with 5284 signatures, was sent to the Hon. C. J. Fox, and, by him, presented to the house the next day.



F I N I S,